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tailed by climbing up to all the holes seen in the dead pine trees and stumps. But in most cases a blow with a rock or club against the stump is considered a sufficient test as to whether the tenement is occupied.

So when I rapped at the base of a dead pine stump with a deserted white-headed woodpecker's hole near the top, and no sign of life appeared, I was about to move on, but the hole looked too promising and I decided to investigate further. Before starting to climb up the sixteen feet to the nest I stood on the hillside above the tree and threw a big rock against the top. The whole side split off down as far as the bottom of the hole and out flew a little owl, and perched on a fir tree a few yards away. We had no shot-gun but my companion carried a 41-Colts, long barrel. I reached that and fired at the bird, missing of course. It flew across a canyon and perched high in another tree fifty or sixty yards away. I was disgusted and handed back the pistol hopelessly. But my friend had

been in the habit of breaking glass bottles thrown into the air so he took the pistol and brought down the owl at long range the first shot.

We then turned our attention to the stump and saw a suspicious mass of hair and fibre resting on what was left of the now exposed bottom of the hole. I shinned up the stump as carefully as possible for fear of shaking the nest loose. It was made of felted hair and fibre similar to the nest of a chickadee. In it were two nearly globular white eggs with incubation just begun. The bird was somewhat shot up by the 41-caliber bullet but I preserved the skin and packed it away for future reference. It lay neglected till May 1897 when I sent it to Dr. C. Hart Merriam for identification. He pronounced it the little flammulated screech owl (*Megascops flammeolus idahoensis*). I have investigated nearly every deserted woodpecker's hole seen since then and rapped on many pine stumps but have seen no more of Megascops.

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### Winter Plumage of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher.

BY H. S. SWARTH, LOS ANGELES, CAL.

**I**N the few works containing any detailed account of the black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) but little information is to be found concerning the changes of plumage gone through by the male bird, the author usually contenting himself with the statement that the young male resembles the female. It is a bird, moreover, whose life history is, I think, known to but few ornithologists, and I doubt if any extensive series of specimens has been taken through the year, showing the changes of plumage undergone by the male. I was under the impression, as is, I believe, the general idea, that during the fall and winter months the two sexes were always indistinguishable; and that the black cap, the distinguishing mark of the male, was

acquired by moult during the early spring months.

This may be true in part, but that it is invariably the rule is a mistake. I had taken many specimens between August and March showing no black on the head, with the exception of the almost invisible black streak over the eye, which is, I believe, always present in the male; and others during March and April undergoing moult over the entire crown; so I was the more surprised on taking on Dec. 13, 1901, a male bird with the black cap nearly complete, though not quite as extensive as in most spring specimens, and with the black feathers tipped with the blue-gray color of the rest of the upper parts, so that the black was not apparent unless the feathers were ruffled. It

would have taken but little abrasion of the tips of these feathers to have rendered this bird indistinguishable from specimens taken during April and May. On Dec. 19 I secured another, almost a counterpart of the one described above, except that the black on the crown was not quite so extensive as in that bird.

Whether these birds acquire the spring plumage through a moult of the entire crown, or whether they merely renew the few feathers which are entirely gray, is a question. As I have taken one or two summer birds showing very faint traces of gray in the black crown, I rather incline to the latter supposition. Possibly those birds which retain more or less of a black cap through the winter, are the old males; the younger ones retaining the plumage of the female until the spring. Possibly, also, for several years they reassume this plumage each fall, and after each fall moult a few more gray-tipped black feathers remain on the crown. As to the black streak over the eye, I

think that it is acquired at an early age; I have taken quite young birds which show it distinctly.

The time for the spring moult seems to be extremely variable; I have specimens taken at the end of February, with no trace of the black crown, and not yet commencing to moult; while on January 20, 1902 I took one with many pin feathers on the head and the black cap nearly complete. Usually, I think that the change of plumage is not finished before the first week in April. No part of the bird but the crown seems to be affected by the moult, but winter birds have the back tinged with brown, which color disappears by spring. Often the plumage presents rather a worn and abraded appearance by the time the black cap is donned; I have taken specimens which had just barely acquired their black cap, and yet their retrices were so worn that the white markings of the lateral ones were completely obliterated.

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### An Unusual Set of Eggs of Clarke Nutcracker.

BY H. C. JOHNSON, AMERICAN FORK, UTAH.

I HAVE the great good fortune and honor to record the taking on April 8, this year, of Clarke nutcracker, (*Nucifraga columbiana*) male parent nest and five eggs; also the female parent, nest and three eggs on April 17, by W. Dunsdon on the southwest slope of Box Elder Mountain, Wasatch Range, Utah Co., Utah.

The same collector secured the three nests mentioned in THE CONDOR, May-June 1900, and on the same mountain, Mr. Dunsdon to whom all honor is due is an old and seasoned miner and prospector and above all a courageous mountaineer. For four consecutive years he has made some of the gamiest mountain climbs in March and April, seeking the nests of that elusive *rara avis*, Clarke crow. He will permit no dallying with names, laughs at your

latin and will not stand Clarke nutcracker or Clarke crow; "It is just simply 'camp robber,' lad, for I have known it as such before you were born and that settles it."

In March he tried a "little trip" but could not get up the mountain, but early in April he made another attempt, gaining the altitude where he found his previous nests in 1900. According to former experience gained he watched the birds rather than the trees but could not get around very much on account of the deep snow. Finally he was rewarded by seeing one fly directly to a large balsam tree near by; then he could see the nest. The setting bird immediately left the nest and the newcomer took charge of the incubation. For some two hours he waited, then the mate returned allowing the other to go. In